



Zion National Park

Long-Range Interpretive Plan

June 2014



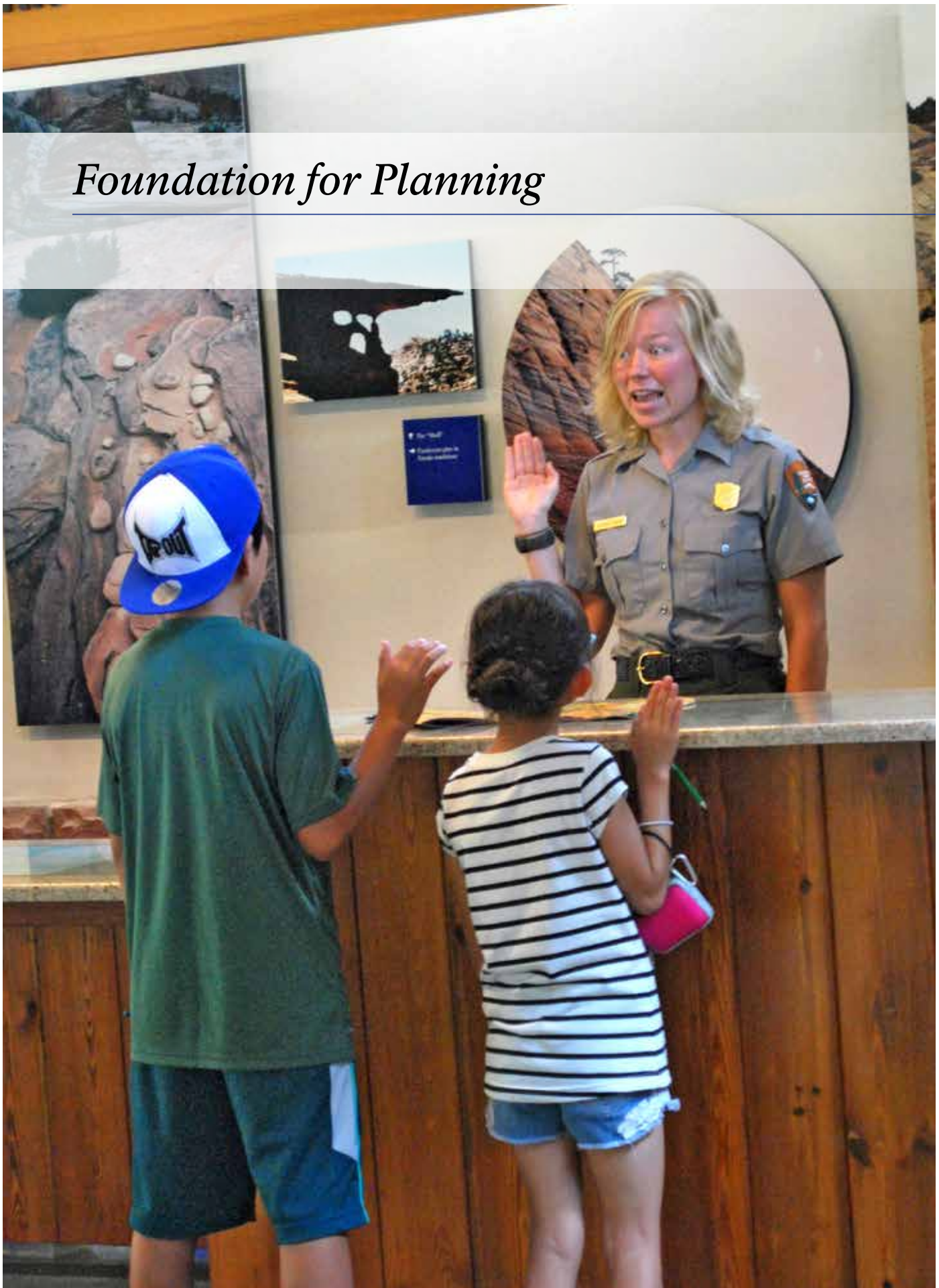
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Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Zion National Park
Harpers Ferry Center
Interpretive Planning

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Foundation for Planning



Executive Summary

This Long-Range Interpretive Plan (LRIP) includes recommendations for personal services and non-personal media to be developed over the next 7-10 years. The LRIP addresses three segments of Zion National Park (Zion Canyon, Kolob Canyons, and Wilderness) as distinct geographical areas which require individual approaches to interpretation and visitor services.

Using the park's 2013 Foundation Document as a base, the LRIP Foundation workshop was held at the Zion Lodge in May of 2013. During this workshop participants revised the interpretive themes and completed other initial LRIP planning components. The LRIP Recommendations Section workshop was held in August 2013. The planning team formalized concepts from the May workshop and developed specific recommendations to link audience interests with park significance, interpretive themes, resources and values, and visitor experience goals.

Curriculum-based education programs and school outreach are not included in this plan; the park will embark on an education plan in the near future.

The Park

Located in Washington, Iron, and Kane Counties in southwestern Utah, Zion National Park encompasses some of the most scenic canyon country in the United States. The park is characterized by high plateaus, a maze of narrow, deep, sandstone canyons, and striking rock towers and mesas. The North Fork of the Virgin River has carved a spectacular gorge through Zion Canyon, where sandstone walls rise 2,000 to 3,000 feet above the canyon floor. The southern part of the park is a lower desert area, with colorful mesas bordered by rocky canyons and washes. The northern sections of the park are higher plateaus covered by forests.

Zion is one of the earliest additions to the national park system. On July 31, 1909, President Taft issued a proclamation setting aside 15,200 acres as the Mukuntuweap National Monument. In 1918 another presidential proclamation enlarged the monument to 76,800 acres and changed its name to Zion National Monument. Congress established the area as a national park in 1919. A second Zion National Monument (now called the Kolob Canyons) was established by presidential proclamation in 1937. Congress added the Kolob Canyons to Zion National Park in 1956. The park currently encompasses 148,733 acres.

On March 30, 2009, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act (Public Law 111-11) designated the vast majority of Zion National Park as wilderness. A total of 124,462 acres of Zion is designated wilderness (84 percent of the park), and 9,047 acres (6 percent of the park) are recommended for wilderness designation. This means that 90 percent of the park is managed as wilderness, as per NPS policy. The legislation also designated 144 miles of wild and scenic rivers in Zion National Park, the first wild and scenic rivers designated in Utah.

Zion's spectacular scenery attracts visitors from all over the world.

Zion is the seventh most visited and the third highest revenue generator in the National Park Service.



Visitation to the park was about three million people in 2012. Visitors to Zion enjoy deep cool canyons, high wooded plateaus, and vast warm deserts.

Zion offers a variety of recreational opportunities and activities including driving scenic roads, hiking, backpacking, canyoneering, taking photographs, and wildlife viewing, to name a few.

Zion is a leader in protecting natural resources and embracing sustainable practices that reduce the effects of park operations on climate change. In order to accomplish this, Zion has implemented sustainable policies and practices, including eliminating the need to purchase bottled water in plastic containers by providing water bottle filling stations; creating a recycling program for staff, visitors, and concessionaires; inserting solar panels that provide electricity to many of the park buildings; and using energy efficient vehicles. These actions will help Zion meet the challenge of the National Park Service to leave park resources unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

2013 Foundation Document

The following statements are drawn from the 2013 Foundation Document.

Purpose

The purpose of Zion National Park is to preserve the dramatic geology including Zion Canyon and a labyrinth of deep and brilliantly colored Navajo sandstone canyons formed by extraordinary processes of erosion at the margin of the Colorado Plateau; to safeguard the park's wilderness character and its wild and scenic river values; to protect evidence of human history; and to provide for scientific research and the enjoyment and enlightenment of the public.

Statements of Significance

Zion is a geologic showcase of brilliantly colored strata highlighted by sheer Navajo sandstone cliffs that are among the highest in the world and expose remnants of the largest known sand dune system. Geologic processes continue today as the free-flowing Virgin River rapidly cuts into the margin of the Colorado Plateau, incising a multitude of deep narrow canyons. An abundance of canyon springs, fed by groundwater, create hanging gardens and grottos that support endemic varieties of flora and fauna. These exceptional features and processes contribute to the outstanding scenery and scientific value of the park.

Zion National Park's range of topography and location at the juncture of the Colorado Plateau, Mojave Desert, and Great Basin regions have created the environment for a wide variety of life forms, including rare and endemic species that exist in this small geographic area, providing opportunities for valuable scientific research.

The Zion Wilderness preserves the undeveloped nature and natural environment of the spectacular network of colorful deep sandstone



NPS Photo

canyons, high forested plateaus, and striking rock towers, as well as opportunities for visitors to experience a strong sense of solitude and remoteness from civilization.

Utah's first designated wild and scenic rivers flow through the park carving a colorful labyrinth of canyons across layers of time. These rivers, fed by natural undiminished spring flows from the Navajo sandstone aquifers, and sculpted by unimpeded torrents of flood waters, have an ecological value that far exceeds their spatial extent in the park.

In a canyon environment, Zion preserves human history of the Ancestral Puebloan, Paiute, pioneers, early 20th century tourism, and the NPS development along the Virgin River. The remarkable integrity of these resources provides a setting ideal for future education and research.

Zion National Park is a world-renowned destination that offers opportunities for a range of recreational and educational experiences including passive activities and high adventure excursions. Visitors are able to step inside the scenery and can find themselves surrounded by narrow cliff walls in places of extraordinary scale such as the Virgin River Narrows. These experiences often create profound emotional and personal connections for a diversity of visitors.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Geologic Showcase. Zion's spectacular sedimentary layers form the center of the Grand Staircase, the great regional sequence of cliffs and slopes linking the ancient rocks of Grand Canyon, through the Mesozoic layers of Zion, to the high plateaus of Bryce Canyon and Cedar Breaks. Zion contains the finest exposure of Navajo sandstone, in places exceeding 2,000 feet in thickness, a remnant of the largest sand dune system known to have



NPS Photo

existed on the planet. In addition to the dramatic high cliffs, the park displays a landscape modified by recent volcanism and an exceptionally rapid rate of erosion. These natural processes have produced large landslides, inverted valleys, deep slot canyons, hanging valleys, and have exposed significant paleontological resources.

Water Shapes the Landscape. The park's many free-flowing rivers carry powerful flash floods and tremendous sediment loads that are the primary agent of erosion. These rivers continue to carve into the edge of the Colorado Plateau, shaping Zion's dramatic scenery. By virtue of rivers cutting through the water-bearing Navajo sandstone, numerous canyon springs, fed by groundwater, create hanging gardens and seeping alcoves that form moist oases in a desert environment and sustain perennial river flows.

Convergence of Ecoregions.

The convergence of the Colorado Plateau, Mojave Desert, and Great Basin ecoregions combined with the vertical relief and high concentration of canyons has provided a diversity of habitats for the array of life forms found in Zion National Park, including rare, endangered, and endemic species.

Natural Resource Quality and

Function. The quality of air, water, night sky, vegetation, and wildlife resources in Zion National Park

are preserved in some cases by allowing natural processes and natural disturbance regimes (such as fires, floods, and rockfalls) to exist, thereby promoting an environment predominated by natural processes. Wildland fire, in particular, provides the natural disturbance regime that maintains many of the park's ecosystems and is critical to maintaining wilderness character and associated natural resource values.

Wilderness Character. Eighty-four percent of Zion is designated wilderness, managed with restraint and humility to protect the labyrinth of multicolored canyons. The vast majority of this wilderness is entirely natural and undeveloped with no trails, campsites, or structures; where even in a park with millions of visitors each year one can explore and experience the sights and sounds of solitude.

The Remnants of Humanity's Past. The cultural resources in Zion National Park encompass a continuum of human experience of both native and nonnative people. The nationally significant Parunuweap Canyon

Local Paiutes have presented a series of cultural demonstrations for the public, including their Mountain Sheep Dance.



Archaeological District contains “type” sites through which the Virgin Branch of the Anasazi were initially recognized as a distinctive regional manifestation of Ancestral Puebloan culture. For contemporary people, including American Indians and European American descendants of pioneers, many of the park's cultural sites, objects, landscapes, and natural resources remain important touchstones that contribute to group identity and heritage.

Wild and Scenic Rivers. Zion's wild and scenic rivers provide for a wide range of river values and are composed of more than 140 miles of free-flowing, largely undeveloped water courses that provide habitat for six native fish species. Over time, the rivers have sliced through rock layers thousands of feet thick. The carved canyons provide habitat for the threatened Mexican spotted owl and cool canyon microclimates are home to hanging gardens where the endemic Zion snail resides.

Opportunities for Connection to the Resources. Zion National Park provides the visitors a wide range of high-quality recreational experiences through exceptional infrastructure and services, educational opportunities, and resources of high integrity. Zion National Park interprets park resource meanings, research, and management initiatives to encourage inspiration, learning, and stewardship.

Preserving and Studying the Natural and Cultural History of Zion.

Museum and archival collections record Zion's natural and cultural history. Park collections illuminate the stories of American Indians, pioneers, NPS history, and the park's complex natural environment—documenting a long and highly active history of scientific study and scholarly research. The collection also demonstrates the ongoing importance of continued scientific study to develop and implement best management practices.

Other Important Resources and Values

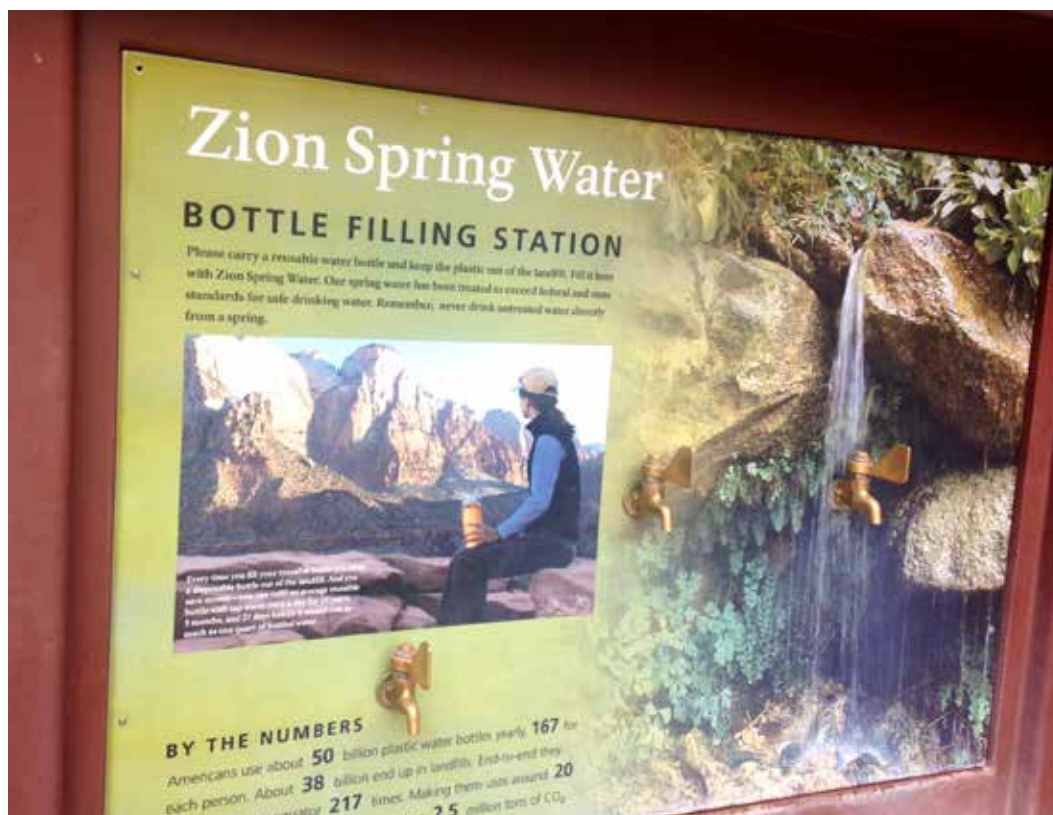
An Engineered Way of Life. The Zion Lodge/Birch Creek Historic District represents early economic development and tourism inside the Grand Circle and Southern Utah. Residences and maintenance buildings in the Oak Creek and Pine Creek historic districts are intricate pieces of early NPS history representing naturalistic/NPS-rustic construction. The Zion-Mt. Carmel Highway and tunnel represent the determination, innovation, and engineering feats of the early 20th century. Other roads, trails, ditches, bridges, cabins, and remnants of sawmills and homesteads showcase early pioneering efforts inside Zion National Park and NPS efforts to develop facilities for visitor access and accommodation. Parunuweap Canyon contains prehistoric, intact, and valuable cultural resources that provide a valuable insight to prehistoric ways of life. Zion preserves and studies these diverse cultures and their engineered ways of life in the desert environment.

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes encourage exploration of the context in which events or natural processes occurred and the effects of those events and processes. They go beyond a mere description of the event or process to foster multiple opportunities to experience and consider the park and its resources. Themes help to explain why a park story is relevant to people who may otherwise be unaware of connections they have to an event, time, or place associated with the park.

The following six interpretive themes have been identified for Zion National Park:

- The geologic features of Zion National Park, including the premier exposure of Navajo sandstone, the brilliantly colored rock layers, and Zion's place in the Grand Staircase, are both scientifically significant and allow



Zion was the first National Park to go completely disposable water bottle free. Waysides set within the free water bottle filling stations throughout the park interpret the importance of reducing, reusing and recycling.

us to immerse ourselves within their immense scope of size and time.

- The wild and scenic Virgin River and its tributaries are the lifeblood of Zion National Park, continuing to carve with powerful force as they drop uncontrolled through the landscape, to reveal Zion's geologic history, shape its majestic canyons, and provide a unique watery oasis amidst the arid land.
- Located at the convergence of three ecoregions, Zion National Park contains a richness and diversity of flora and fauna that belies the park's extreme topography and arid conditions.
- The undeveloped vast high plateaus and intimate sandstone canyons of Zion National Park and its designated wilderness provide unparalleled opportunities for a limited number of visitors to experience solitude, adventure, inspiration, and introspection in a natural environment, while creating a backdrop for all to appreciate the importance of protecting wild places.
- Zion National Park is the setting for a legacy of generations of people, all of whom lived their lives deeply connected to this landscape.

In 2014, the Las Vegas youth that participated in the "Concrete to Canyons" program were invited to return for a family camping experience.





National Initiatives

A Call to Action highlights the NPS Centennial in 2016. Reaching out to urban audiences and replacing out-dated media are some of the actions that resonate with Zion National Park. In the past year, Zion started doing much more community outreach, including attending county fairs and other groups' special events. In 2013, the park received a grant from the National Park Foundation to bring children from Las Vegas to have a multi-day wilderness experience at Zion. Action 19 "Out with the Old" has brought to the forefront Zion's need to replace outdated waysides throughout the park. In 2013, all the wilderness trailhead waysides were replaced.

Visitor Experience Goals

Visitors to Zion National Park will:

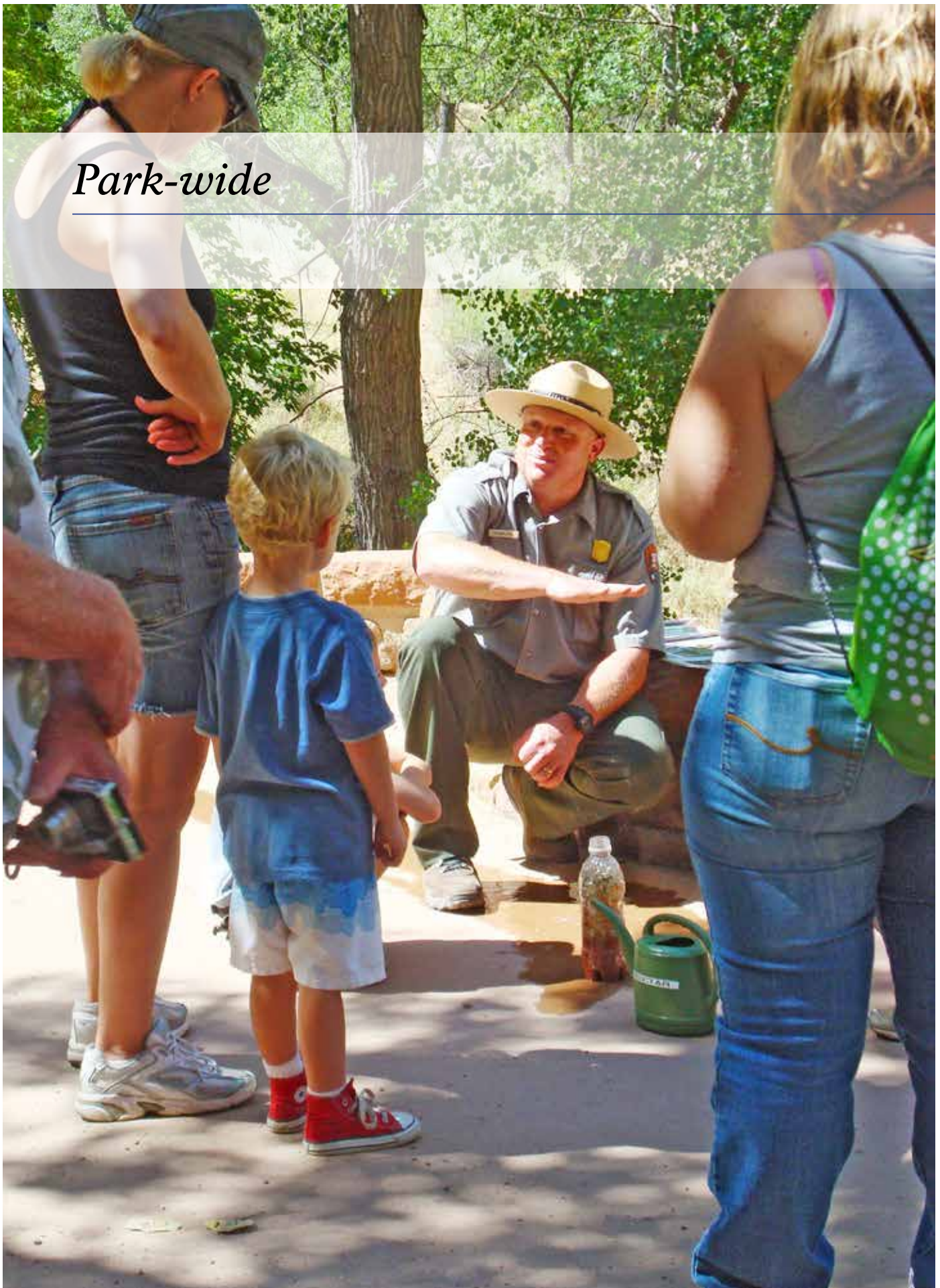
- be provided with excellent customer service and high-quality visitor experiences.
- be provided with opportunities to

understand and appreciate park resources.

- be educated about the importance of preserving park resources.
- benefit from park efforts to reach out to diverse and underrepresented audiences.
- access comprehensive and easy-to-use planning, orientation, and way-finding tools– online, in print, with signage, at contact stations, other facilities, etc.
- be provided with opportunities to connect to park management goals and standards, including wilderness character values and the need for sustainability.

In 1925, Angus M. Woodbury began working as the first ranger naturalist in Zion, leading morning hikes and afternoon talks.

Park-wide



Existing Conditions

Addressing Zion as Three Distinct Units

Zion can be split into three sections, not only geographically, but also based on visitation, visitor services, and park management. Although some visitors may have the necessary time to visit all three areas, many may only see one.

The most popular section of the park is Zion Canyon, the section of the park between the Zion Canyon Visitor Center and the Temple of Sinawava. It is the oldest and most well-known area of the park and is the only section served by the shuttle. It contains a museum, visitor center, nature center, two campgrounds, a lodge, a picnic area, and most of the front country trails.

The Kolob Canyons section of the park is located adjacent to Interstate 15 in the northwest section of the park. It takes a little less than an hour to get to the Kolob Canyons from Zion Canyon. The visitation to this area is much lower, but like the main canyon, is increasing. There is a small contact station, a scenic drive, and three trails, two of which lead into dedicated wilderness.

The third section is the park wilderness, which makes up 84 percent of the park, mostly on the East Side, off Kolob Terrace Road, and off the Kolob Scenic Drive. While no interpretive signage is allowed in the wilderness areas, park interpreters would like to ensure that visitors to these areas receive the necessary interpretive, safety, and resource protection messages. In addition, it is a challenge to communicate the values and dimensions of wilderness to park users who may understand it only as a visual backdrop for their activities at the park.

Visitor Profile and Trends

Zion National Park is one of the premier parks in the National Park Service. Visitors come from all over the country and around the world

to visit the park. Many visit Zion as a “once in a lifetime” trip, which often includes nearby Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon. Others visit regularly and are drawn to the adventure and breathtaking beauty of Zion.

Foreign visitors have been steadily increasing at Zion. It is an especially popular destination for French, Dutch, and German travelers, but recently Asian travelers are becoming more common in Zion. It is not unusual during certain times of the year to hear mostly foreign languages being spoken in the park.

By contrast, the vast majority of American visitors are Caucasian, non-Latino, despite the park’s proximity to Las Vegas, Nevada. This is a discrepancy the park would like to address.

Rangers at the park have found drop-in programs at shuttle stops and trailheads are an effective way to reach hundreds of visitors over the course of a few hours.





Many of the Zion's programs are geared for youth and families.

2009 Visitor Study Results

- Trails: 75% of summer, and 71% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Hiking for Less Than 2 Hours: 92% of summer, and 93% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Hiking for More Than 2 Hours: 43% of summer, and 39% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Backpacking: 3% of summer, and 2% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Horseback Riding: 3% of summer, and 1% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Bicycling: 3% of summer, and 3% of fall visitors did this activity.

Most visitors only spend a few hours or a day in Zion. They tend to stay in Zion Canyon or only visit Kolob Canyons. They will typically be interested in completing one or two popular day hikes in addition to doing some sightseeing along the scenic drive. These visitors need orientation, trip planning assistance, and information about hiking options. Some obtain this information before arriving (via the park website, or independent websites and guidebooks), while almost one third of our visitors seek this information at the contact stations once they are here.

Visitors who experience the park with a commercially-guided tour bus are limited in what they can discover about the park's resources and offerings. They often have very little contact with park staff and interpretive offerings. Most first-time visitors and those with limited time to get to know Zion tend to be a higher risk for safety concerns and resource impacts, mostly because of their lack of knowledge and/or the fact that they have not yet formed emotional or intellectual connections with park resources.

Repeat visitors and those that spend a few days in Zion will be able to have a more complete experience and may seek opportunities for adventure, enjoy in-depth ranger-led programs, and be interested in exploring other sections of the park outside of the main canyon. Many also find their favorite spots and enjoy sharing those places with others they know, acting as informal tour guides.

2009 Visitor Study Results

- 74% of summer, and 60% of fall visitor groups were family groups.
- 57% of summer, and 80% of fall visitor groups did not have any children in their groups.
- 74% of summer visitors and 60% of fall visitors had not visited the park prior to 2000.
- 3% of summer visitors and 1% of fall visitors were traveling with a commercial guided tour group.

Several groups of specialized audiences visit Zion to pursue a specific activity, such as canyoneering, climbing, painting, etc. They often have predetermined expectations and receive their park information from outside sources. They often tend to feel more ownership than other audiences and help the park by their informed observations of conditions and activities.

There are also a number of visitors who are completely independent. Most are locals and some families have lived in the area for generations. Their connections to Zion are very strong and the park might consider ways to capitalize on their dedication. This is one of the hardest groups for interpreters to reach when they need to get out a safety or resource protection message since there are numerous ways to enter sections of the park without going past an entrance station.

Issues and Influences

Increasing Visitor Use

For the past several decades visitation to Zion National Park has grown exponentially. For years, the capacity of visitors in Zion Canyon was determined by the limited number of parking spaces. However, with the introduction of the shuttle system in 2000, the park has been able to move more people into and throughout Zion Canyon. Both Kolob Canyons and the Wilderness sections of the park have seen an increase in popularity. The park wants to ensure that the visitor experience is not diminished and that park resources are not impaired as a result of expanding visitation. The Division of Interpretation will play a key role in implementing solutions to maintain the right balance of visitor access and resource protection. The park will also develop products for audiences to experience and connect with park resources virtually.

2009 Visitor Study Results

- The primary reason for visiting Zion National Park was sightseeing/scenic drive (54% summer, 51% fall).
- Sightseeing/Scenic Driving: 92% of summer, and 93% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Scenic Pullouts/Overlooks: 56% of summer, and 68% of fall visitors used this resource.

Budget and Staffing Constraints

In recent years, the base budget for interpretation has decreased. The staff has been shifting the focus of interpretive services by increasing drop-in programs and reducing ranger-led programs in an effort to reach more visitors with less staff. However, the park's social media program has been extremely successful. As base funding dwindles, the interpretive program is increasingly dependent on volunteers and grants in order to maintain quality services.

Visitor Safety Messages

Zion is continually looking for meaningful ways to communicate safety messages, including flash flood dangers, how to avoid heat exhaustion, and that feeding animals is harmful. Park staff respond weekly to numerous Search and Rescues for visitors who attempt activities beyond their skill or physical abilities, those that are careless or lack awareness of their surroundings, and those who purposefully take risks that place themselves or others in danger. A recent safety study showed that the park is doing a good job of getting certain messages out to visitors, such as the importance of drinking water in the desert. The Interpretation and Wilderness staffs are successful in sharing critical safety information about flash floods, hiking along cliff-edges, and dealing with extreme desert heat.

As visitation continues to increase, so do concerns about visitor experience and resource damage.



Current Interpretive Program

Personal Services: Zion currently has three permanent, year-round positions, three permanent subject-to-furlough positions, and between 15 to 20 seasonal positions devoted to personal services. They staff four contact stations- Zion Canyon Visitor Center (year-round), Kolob Canyons Visitor Center (open year round, but staffed by interpreters only April-September), Zion Human History Museum (March-November), and Zion Nature Center (June-August). Two seasonals also answer the information phone line March-September. Staff members provide a variety of formal programs including talks, walks, drop-in programs, shuttle tours, and evening slideshows at the campground and Zion Lodge. June through August, and during Spring Breaks, Zion's Education staff run programs geared specifically for children and families, including hands-on programs, arts and crafts, story time reading, and music programs.

The interpretive staff uses a variety of personal and non-personal services to help connect visitors to the inherent dangers at Zion, including flash flooding.



In 2013 the park also partnered with the local Paiute Tribe to present several Native American demonstrations. Additional interpretive programs are presented to visitors in the park on a regular basis by the Zion Natural History Association, which runs a Field Institute, focusing on providing a range of in-depth visitor experiences, from wildflower walks to service projects. Concessioners also lead tram tours for bus groups and horseback rides in the park. Volunteers further augment park staff by assisting with visitor services on the trails and at the contact stations as well as presenting demonstrations and formal interpretive programs. In 2013, the park made over 1,500,000 contacts with visitors through personal services.

2009 Visitor Study Results

- TIS Radio Information Station: 13% of summer, and 8% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Park Website: 36% of summer, and 26% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Prior to this visit, visitor groups most often obtained information about Zion National Park through friends/relatives/word of mouth (52% summer, 56% fall), and travel guides/tour books/publications (52% summer, 39% fall).
- Park Brochure/Map: 90% of summer, and 86% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Park Newspaper: 62% of summer, and 52% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Wilderness Planner Guide: 7% of summer, and 5% of fall visitors used this resource.

Non-personal Services: Zion has one permanent subject-to-furlough position and one term position that focus solely on non-personal interpretation, including signs, waysides, publications, and

exhibits. They produce a quarterly park newspaper and have annual newspapers available in French, German, Italian, and Spanish languages. They also oversee the park website and social media sites. The park has active Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, Instagram, and YouTube accounts.

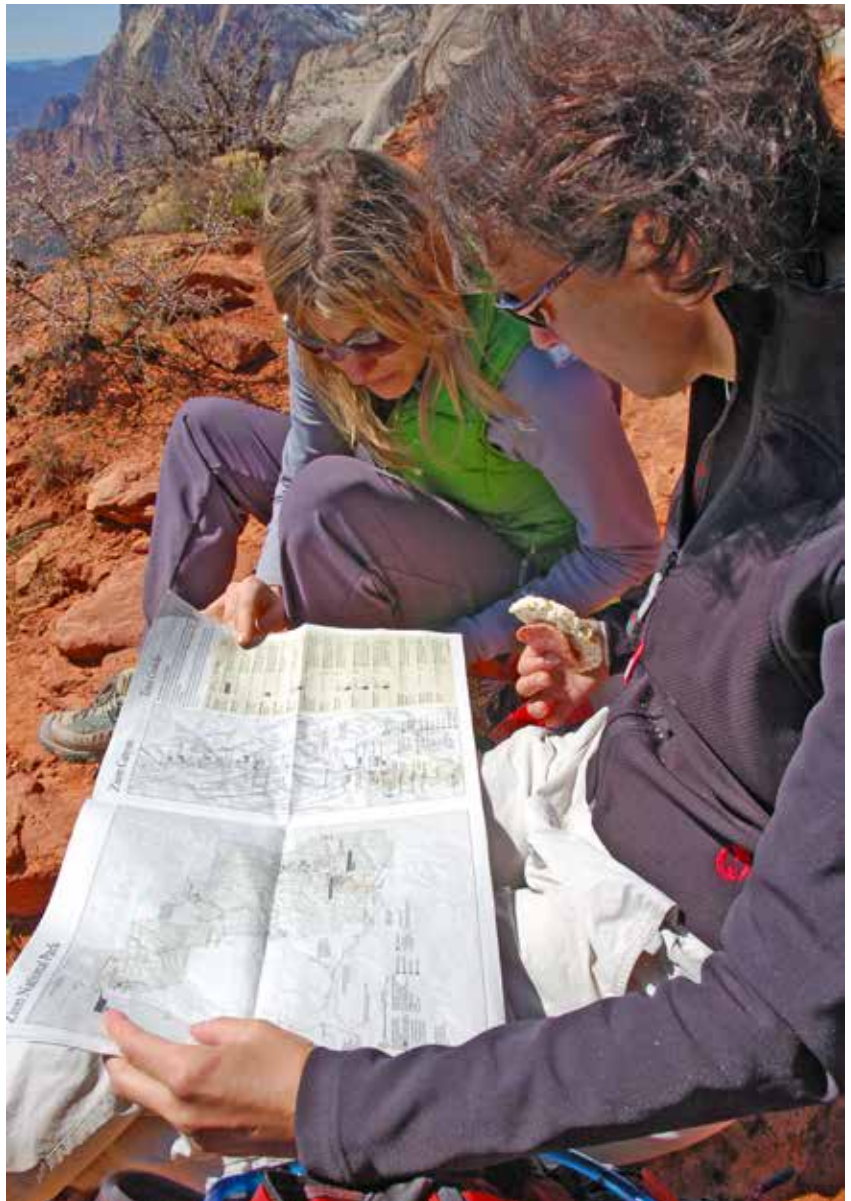
Park-wide Future Interpretive Program

Goals to Improve Visitor Experience

- Ensure visitors are getting appropriate and accurate information from all local venues by fostering a better relationship between the park, the surrounding towns, and local businesses
- Improve pre-trip planning information for visitors
- Make visitors more aware of what it takes to manage Zion National Park

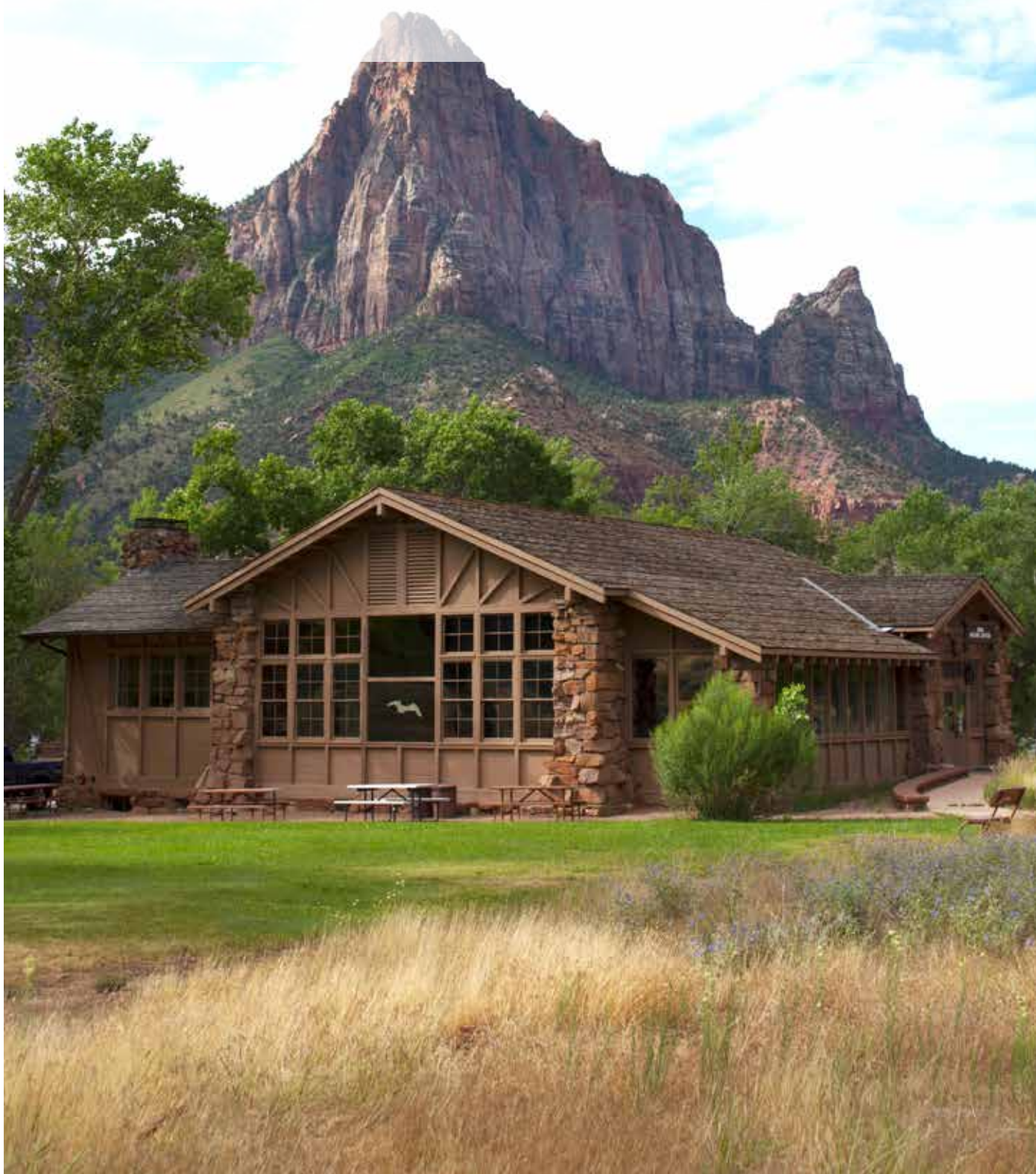
Recommendations from the Workshop

- Host community meetings with interpretive presentations and resource materials
- Initiate partnership with Springdale for a night sky program
- Develop additional podcasts
- Create a Zion app (through HFC)
- Use roadside pullouts along approaches to park for more than just shuttle and tunnel information
- Develop live or recorded programs which serve to make visitors and park staff more aware of current research
- Increase year-round staffing to meet the visitation needs in the expanding shoulder seasons



The Park's Map and Guide, updated four times a year, serves as an in-depth trip planner. It is available on the park's website and approximately 700,000 English, French, German, Italian and Spanish newspapers are handed out annually.

Zion Canyon



Zion Canyon

Zion Canyon is by far the busiest section of the park with almost three million people passing through the park annually. It is approximately nine miles in length and encompasses around 2,000 acres. It contains many of the famous geologic formations and adventurous hikes, including Angels Landing, Observation Point, and The Narrows.

Existing Conditions

Visitor Profile and Trends

Most visitors to Zion Canyon only visit the main canyon, except for perhaps driving the Zion-Mount Carmel Highway, which runs alongside designated wilderness on the park's east side. During the spring, summer, and fall, use of the shuttle system is mandatory except for tour buses and lodge guests. They may drive to Zion Lodge, located approximately halfway up the Zion Scenic Drive.

A wide range of visitors come to Zion Canyon, some with more time to spend than others, and some with more abilities to explore the plethora of trails located at each shuttle stop. Local and international visitors alike enjoy the unique experiences Zion has to offer. Some literally immerse themselves in the river or under the waterfalls at Emerald Pools or Weeping Rock. Others test their courage at the dramatic drop-offs on the Hidden Canyon Trail or Angels Landing. Still others visit the main canyon to rock climb or create paintings of Zion's sheer cliffs. Others simply enjoy finding an empty rocking chair at the Zion Lodge and taking in the grandeur from there.

Issues and Influences

Facilities

The division of Interpretation staffs three visitor facilities in Zion Canyon: the Zion Canyon Visitor Center, Zion Human History Museum, and Zion



Nature Center. Located within a half-mile of each other, each building serves a unique purpose and audience.

Most visitors begin their trip to Zion National Park at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center. It serves as the primary orientation point for visitors and the location where the Zion Canyon and Springdale Shuttle lines converge. Within the visitor center is a general information desk, a wilderness information desk, and a large cooperating association bookstore. The complex includes an array of outdoor orientation and interpretive displays. The visitor center complex is vast and orientation within it can be difficult for visitors.

The Zion Human History Museum is a location for visitors to seek more information about the park and the people that have resided in the canyon. The museum has several human history exhibits, an auditorium to show the park orientation film, a small temporary exhibit area, and a small bookstore. The complex also has a covered patio area where ranger-led talks are given throughout the day. The museum dedicates a vast amount of space to a single interpretive subject, which may limit its effectiveness. It also seems to be visited more often in the afternoon, after visitors have hiked and are looking for a place to get out of the heat. Therefore the film may be better utilized as a Zion recap film rather than an introduction to the park.

Participants to this planning process discussed broadening the scope of the Zion Human History Museum to include both natural and cultural items in the park's collection.



NPS photo

The Zion Nature Center is open during the busiest time of the year and is an interpretive destination for families with children. There are an array of interactive interpretive exhibits designed for children and a picnic area outside. Although the Zion Nature Center has a parking area, it is not on the Zion Canyon Shuttle route, which limits its visibility and visitation. It is on the Par'us Trail, which connects to both the Zion Canyon Visitor Center and the Zion Human History Museum.

The narration on the shuttle provides visitors with orientation, safety information, and opportunities for them to make interpretive connections with the resources in Zion Canyon.

The Shuttle System

In 2000, the park initiated a shuttle bus system to help relieve traffic congestion during peak season. It is free and consists of nine stops, from



the Zion Canyon Visitor Center to the Temple of Sinawava. Today, the shuttle is mandatory April through October as well as on weekends in the shoulder seasons and is the means by which at least 75 percent of visitors experience the park. The shuttle provides a predictable path for visitors to experience the main canyon and an opportunity for the park to craft that experience.

Carrying Capacity Concerns

The shuttle relieved the previous carrying capacity of Zion Canyon, which was determined by the limited number of parking spaces. The shuttle also made it easier for visitors to visit multiple parts of Zion Canyon and not have to worry about parking near each stop. While the shuttle has been overwhelmingly successful at moving visitors and bringing them into Zion Canyon, it has also raised concerns about overcrowding and resource protection in high traffic areas.

Current Interpretive Program

Personal Services: Most of the park's personal services occur in Zion Canyon. Rangers present talks on aspects of geology, history, and wildlife on the patio behind the Zion Human History Museum. They lead hikes and history walks, give shuttle tours and evening programs, and set up tables and props for drop-in programs along trails or at viewpoints. With recent staffing cuts, the interpretive staff has reduced the number of ranger-led hikes and increased the number of drop-in programs, where they might be able to contact upwards of 500 visitors in a span of a few hours.

Several other groups also lead personal services in Zion Canyon either as formal partners or concessionaires. The Zion Canyon Field Institute, part of the Zion Natural History Association, leads several trips in the main canyon. Most of them focus on a specific topic, such as wildlife or

geology, and usually cater to half-day or all day experiences that the park staff is unable to provide. The Zion Lodge concession leads tram tours for bus groups to the Temple of Sinawava since those buses are not allowed up canyon. Across from the Zion Lodge, there is also a concessioner that leads one-hour and half-day horseback riding trips.

Non-personal Services: There is a wide variety of non-personal services within Zion Canyon. With 75 percent of park visitors using the shuttle to experience the park, the shuttle narration is one of the most influential on-site non-personal services in Zion Canyon. The interpretive narration is continuous from the Zion Canyon Visitor Center to the Temple of Sinawava. It covers a wide variety of topics, including geology, human history, and recreational opportunities. The narration also introduces other challenges. Some visitors feel that it contains too much narrative, does not allow for visitors to properly plan their own trip, and that non-English speakers cannot understand it and therefore often talk over it. The park film is shown at the Zion Human History Museum during the busy season and in the lobby of the Zion Canyon Visitor Center throughout the winter. There are waysides at

each of the shuttle stops and along several of the more popular trails. Many of the waysides are in need of replacement and redesign. They may also be improved by looking at them as a group to ensure all of the park's fundamental resources and values are discussed. New hands-on exhibits are currently being worked on at the Zion Nature Center. The exhibits at the Zion Canyon Visitor Center are all outside, which is inconvenient in such an extreme climate. The exhibits at the Zion Human History Museum are good, but are perhaps too focused on human history, especially when there are no exhibits on geology or natural history in the park.

Future Interpretive Program

Goals to Improve Visitor Experience:

- Create an entire “Zion Canyon Experience” from the time visitors reach the Zion Canyon Visitor Center and board the shuttle through their return. Interpretive messaging should include the visitor center exhibits, the shuttle narration and onboard visuals, the waysides and bulletin boards at each site, as well as the museum and film.



The Zion Canyon Visitor Center, the first stop on the shuttle route, provides trip planning, wilderness permits, and a Cooperating Association bookstore.

- Embrace the “Out with the Old” concept by overhauling exhibits, waysides, and shuttle messaging to ensure continuity.

Recommendations from the Workshop

Priority Recommendations for Zion Canyon

- Create orientation DVD/podcasts for tour buses
- Update park film
- Place management messages inside shuttle buses
- Complete a Visitor Use Management plan for Zion Canyon

Other Recommendations

- Revise shuttle narrative
- Increase shade to outdoor visitor center exhibits
- Create exhibits for visitor center
- Strengthen waysides at individual shuttle stops to create more site identity

- Update exhibits in the Human History Museum to include both cultural and natural history topics
- Create shuttle narration(s) that can be downloaded
- Create self-guiding trail guides as sales items
- Consider formalizing the unnamed and unmaintained trail between the Zion Canyon Scenic Drive and the Virgin River

2009 Visitor Study Results

Zion Canyon

- Museum Orientation Film: 25% of summer, and 16% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Trails From/In Zion Canyon: 70% of summer visitors, and 68% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Zion Canyon Scenic Drive: 75% of summer, and 81% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Zion Canyon VC Exhibits: 54% of summer, and 43% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Zion Canyon Visitor Center: 78% of summer, and 58% of fall visitors went to this site.
- Assistance from Visitor Center Staff: 39% of summer, and 32% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Canyon Overlook Trail: 22% of summer, and 18% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Ranger Led Programs/Activities: 10% of summer, and 2% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Junior Ranger Programs: 4% of summer, and 1% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Roadside/Trailside Exhibits: 41% of summer, and 41% of fall visitors used this resource.

Several youth dress up in park ranger uniforms inside the Zion Nature Center.



Kolob Canyons



Kolob Canyons

Kolob Canyons is in the northwest corner of Zion National Park. It contains a series of narrow box canyons, hanging valleys, and majestic peaks. This section was added to Zion in 1956. The 6,000 acre front-country portion of Kolob Canyons includes a small visitor center, several trailheads, and a six-mile scenic drive with outstanding panoramic views of the Kolob Canyons. The vast majority of Kolob Canyons is designated wilderness. In 2012, 137,000 people visited the Kolob Canyons Visitor Center.

Existing Conditions

Visitor Profile and Trends

Visitation to Kolob Canyons has been increasing by approximately 10 percent annually for the past few years. This has been directly attributed to road construction around Zion Canyon, which for a short time created delays and probably forced some commercial tour companies to choose Kolob Canyons for their visit.

In addition to a growing number of people visiting Kolob Canyons for the first time, it is a very popular place for locals, especially those from the surrounding towns and nearby Cedar City. Many of these people are looking for a quieter place to hike in comparison with Zion Canyon. However, a good number of the families which visit are large, and often exceed the use limit restrictions for the trails located in wilderness. Others come to Kolob Canyons specifically because of its proximity to wilderness. It is a popular starting point for overnight camping trips and strenuous hikes deep into the park.

Issues and Influences

Proximity to the Highway

Kolob Canyons is located directly off I-15 between Cedar City and Saint George, Utah. Some people get off the Interstate because they think the road will connect directly to the Zion Canyon section of the park. Tour bus groups have also been increasingly stopping by the Kolob section of the park, driving the Kolob Scenic Drive, and informing their guests that they



Located immediately adjacent to Interstate 40, the Kolob Canyons Visitor Center serves as a gateway to the northwestern corner of the park.



The Kolob Canyons Visitor Center contains limited space for interpretive exhibits.

have seen the main canyon in order to quickly head to other national parks on their agenda.

Facilities

The Kolob Canyons Visitor Center is very small and more like a contact station. It contains a small Association bookstore, two exhibits, and an information desk shared by the fee, wilderness, and interpretive staffs. All visitors are required to stop at the Kolob Canyons Visitor Center to pay the park entrance fee or show their current pass. Visitors may also obtain required permits on-site for all backpacking campsites, canyoneering

Reading interpretive wayside exhibits is one way visitors can learn the park story at all hours.



routes, and overnight climbing within the wilderness areas of the park.

Wilderness

The canyons and backcountry of Kolob are designated as wilderness areas and are protected for their pristine and primitive environments. Hiking in the Kolob Canyons allows visitors the opportunity for solitude and tranquility in a scenic desert setting. In order to maintain the wilderness character and natural conditions of the area, affiliated groups exceeding twelve members are only permitted to hike the Timber Creek Overlook Trail. This group limit on trails within the designated wilderness is problematic for the increasing visitation at Kolob Canyons. This is especially true on the Middle Fork of Taylor Creek, a fairly easy five-mile round trip trail that crosses the creek numerous times, passes by two historic cabins, and ends at a double arch alcove. It is very popular with large family groups and is currently over the park's established carrying capacity for wilderness. The park has worked on several temporary solutions to limit the numbers of people on that trail, including increasing patrols and blocking off parts of the parking lot.

Current Interpretive Offerings

Personal Services: The interpretive division has only recently started staffing the Kolob Canyons Visitor Center and offering interpretive programs. Last year two seasonals were stationed at Kolob, one presenting more formal interpretation and the other creating several programs geared for Junior Rangers. Ranger-led programs, including talks and hikes, were not well attended but drop-in programs at the trailheads, at the overlook, and in front of the contact station were very successful.

Non-personal Services: The small exhibit on geology at the Kolob Canyons Visitor Center is hands-on

and very well received. The waysides in front of the visitor center and along the Scenic Drive are outdated and some are inaccurate. There also used to be a small brochure about the Scenic Drive that was discontinued.

2009 Visitor Study Results

Kolob Canyons

- Kolob Canyons Scenic Drive: 19% of summer, and 24% of fall visitors went to this site.
- Kolob Canyons Visitor Center: 18% of summer, and 22% of fall visitors went to this site.
- Kolob Canyons VC Exhibits: 12% of summer, and 15% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Maintained Trails from Kolob Canyons Scenic Drive: 8% of summer, and 14% of fall visitors used this resource.

Future Interpretive Program

Goals to Improve Visitor Experience

- Create a cohesive “Kolob Canyons Experience” supported by multiple media venues which presents compelling messages regarding the importance of resource protection and wilderness
- Develop more experiences in the non-wilderness portions of Kolob Canyons in order to relieve the stress of visitation from the wilderness while at the same time providing experiences for the larger groups that are visiting at increasing levels
- Conscientiously referring to the site as “Zion National Park Kolob Canyons” vs “Kolob Canyons” may strengthen the public perception of the site as a part of the National Park
- Provide more interpretive staffing to Kolob Canyons

Recommendations from the Workshop

Priority Recommendations for Kolob Canyons

- Conduct a formal Visitor Study
- Rehabilitate existing wayside exhibits as one comprehensive project
- Create an accessible trail near the Visitor Center
- Re-invent the Visitor Center at Kolob Canyons to be more of a Wilderness Center

Other Recommendations

- Add a wayside at the end of the Timber Creek Trail
- Develop an audio tour for Kolob Canyons Scenic Drive
- Produce a sales brochure of the Scenic Drive
- Reorient and develop a new visitor center within the footprint of the parking lot

Zion Wilderness



Zion Wilderness

84 percent of Zion National Park is preserved as wilderness. This designation ensures that over 124,500 acres of park land will remain untrammelled by man. More than 40,000 people receive permits to visit the Zion Wilderness each year. Permits are needed for all overnight trips, including climbing bivouacs, all through-hikes of The Narrows and its tributaries, all canyons requiring the use of descending gear or ropes, and all trips into The Subway (Left Fork of North Creek). Countless other visitors take day trips into and through the sections of wilderness where no permits are needed.

Existing Conditions

Visitor Profile

Most visitors to Zion's Wilderness have done some pre-trip planning before arriving in the park. Some are completely prepared, while others lack the appropriate training, fitness level, or good judgment to complete their trip safely. Although park management may wish these visitors had a little more guidance or interpretive connections, most are not looking for that.

The number of people who desire wilderness access has been increasing in recent years. Some visitors are complaining about overcrowding in Zion Canyon and are looking for more solitude. Others are participating in the growing sport of canyoneering, for which Zion's numerous slot canyons are perfect. Some visit for other specialized activities, including climbing, horseback riding, photography, camping, and night sky viewing. Others just want to explore Zion's vastness.

Even though most visitors to Zion National Park never set foot inside designated wilderness, it surrounds them throughout their visit.

Issues and Influences

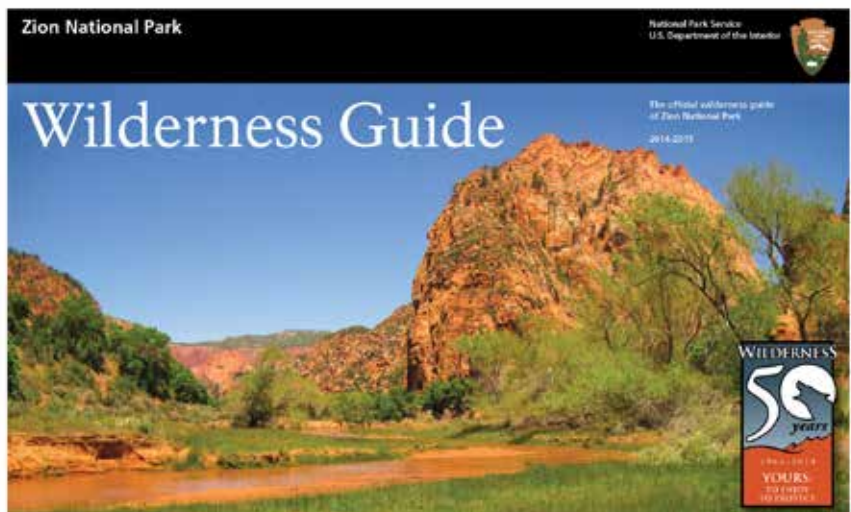
Visitor Use Quotas

Zion National Park has a Backcountry Management Plan with very specific guidance on the number of people that can be in one area of wilderness before it compromises the inherent values of wilderness, including solitude. As visitation increases, the park is faced with how to appropriately manage the wilderness. Several sections are permitted on a first-come, first served basis, while others, such as "The Subway," are on a lottery system because of the overwhelming demand to access them. Still others, such as The Narrows below Big Spring and the Middle Fork of Taylor Creek Trail are out of compliance and the park is trying to decide what measures need to be taken.

Proximity to Roads

Sections of several park roads are surrounded by wilderness on either side, including the Zion-Mount Carmel Highway, the Kolob Terrace Road, and the Kolob Canyons Road. In some instances, this ease of accessibility can threaten the wilderness protection. This is especially true of the Zion-Mount Carmel Highway on the east side of the park. Many people enter the park on the east side and find themselves surrounded by breathtaking sandstone slickrock, yet have not had a chance

Annual Wilderness Guides are available on-line and at the visitor centers.



Zion's Concrete to Canyons project enables urban youth to experience wilderness first hand. Thanks to support from the National Park Foundation and the Zion National Park Foundation, youth from Las Vegas spend three days exploring Zion's Wilderness.



to learn more about the wilderness from their unopened newspaper or the visitor center that is still several miles ahead of them. The landscape off the road is inviting and visitors often unknowingly trample on the sensitive plants and the biological soil crusts, leading to social trailing and erosion.

Limited Interpretive Opportunities

Wilderness legislation limits the amount of signs and nature guiding inside wilderness areas. Therefore interpretive, safety, and resource management messages need to be given to visitors prior to them entering the wilderness.

Current Interpretive Program

Personal Services: The only interpretive programs currently offered in Zion's wilderness are specific small group, resource-based classes hosted by the Zion Canyon Field Institute, a part of the Zion Natural History Association and a recognized partner of the park. The field institute leads classes on wildflowers, wildlife, human history, and geology.

Non-personal Services: The interpretive division publishes an annual Wilderness Guide for trip-planning

and has recently revamped the wilderness pages on the park's website. New waysides were also recently placed at major trailheads that hikers will see before they enter designated wilderness.

Future Interpretive Program

Goals to Improve Visitor Experience:

- Ensure visitors who are utilizing wilderness are also getting pertinent resource messages and opportunities to connect to the park's other Fundamental Resources and Values
- Improve all visitors' understanding of the importance of wilderness, even if they do not set foot in it

Recommendations from the Workshop

Priority Recommendations for the Wilderness

- Add wilderness concept to TIS station on East Side
- Add drop-in programming and roving to Checkerboard Mesa area
- Educate Zion staff on the relevance/values of wilderness
- Conduct wilderness ethics workshops for user groups

- Construct a “Welcome to Wilderness” kiosk at Checkerboard Mesa or as part of East entrance sign

Other Recommendations

- Expand Urban Youth in Wilderness program
- Add wayside on wilderness at Lava Point
- Offer programs on wilderness preparation skills and orienteering
- Promote Kolob Canyons, Kolob Terrace Road, and the park’s East side as wilderness access
- Incorporate Fundamental Resources and Values information into existing wilderness media, including the website, social media, exhibits, and publications
- Upgrade current wilderness boundary signs along Kolob Terrace

2009 Visitor Study Results

- Maintained Trails from Kolob Terrace Road: 2% of summer, and 4% of fall visitors used this resource.
- Night Sky: 18% of summer, and 23% of fall visitors rated this as one of the five most important park resources.
- Plants/Animals: 16% of fall visitors rated this as one of the five most important park resources.
- Protection of Threatened/Endangered Species: 23% of summer, and 22% of fall visitors rated this as one of the five most important park resources.
- Nature/Environment Study: 9% of summer, and 9% of fall visitors did this activity.
- Checkerboard Mesa: 30% of summer, and 31% of fall visitors went to this site.



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